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AT WAR WITH THE SOVIETS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF JOINT SOVIET-AMERICAN AIR OPERATIONS

by

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Foreword

The stunning changes in the complexion of international politics that began late in the decade of the 1980s and continue today will profoundly affect the American military establishment as a whole, and the US Air Force in particular. Decisions about the future course of the military will be made in the early part of the 1990s which will essentially determine the course of the US Air Force well into the next century. Decisions of such importance require thoughtful consideration of all points of view.

This report is one in a special series of CADRE Papers which address many of the issues that decision makers must consider when undertaking such momentous decisions. The list of subjects addressed in this special series is by no means exhaustive, and the treatment of each subject is certainly not definitive. However, the Papers do treat topics of considerable importance to the future of the Air Force, treat them with care and originality, and provide valuable insights.

We believe this special series of CADRE Papers can be of considerable value to policymakers at all levels as they plan for the US Air Force and its role in the so-called postcontainment environment.

About the Author

Capt Mark J. Conversino was born in Canton, Ohio, in 1959 and graduated from Canton McKinley Senior High School in 1977. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 1981. After graduating from US Air Force Officer Training School as a distinguished graduate the following year, he was assigned duties as an aircraft maintenance officer. Captain Conversino held several unit- and wing-level positions with the 410th Bombardment Wing at K. I. Sawyer Air Force Base (AFB), Michigan. Sponsored for graduate school by the USAF Academy's History Department, he enrolled at Indiana University and earned a master's degree in history in 1988. While at Indiana, Captain Conversino completed all course work for the doctorate and is currently a doctor of philosophy candidate in American history. Since arriving at the US Air Force Academy in 1988, Captain Conversino has taught survey courses in military history and World War II and has given lectures on the battle of Stalingrad and US tactical air power in North Africa during World War II. The author of several articles and papers on Operation Frantic, Captain Conversino is working toward completing a dissertation on that subject. He is married and has two children.

Executive Summary

In the summer of 1944, units of the Eighth and Fifteenth United States Army Air Forces began flying to and from bases inside the Soviet Union. Called "shuttle bombing," this operation, code named Frantic, was ostensibly designed to hit targets throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. American planners, however, hoped to demonstrate the value of strategic bombing to the Soviets and, in the process, convince them to allow American units to fly against Japan from bases in Siberia. Beyond that Washington hoped Frantic would bring the US and the USSR closer together. As a military operation, Frantic's impact on the air war against Germany was relatively insignificant: as a political maneuver, it was a dismal failure.

Cultural differences and lingering suspicions between the two nations-together with Moscow's jealousy regarding new Soviet conquests in Eastern Europe-resulted in a bitterly frustrating experience for the Americans. With the apparent end of the cold war, Americans may once again be prone to leap at the chance to "cooperate" militarily with the Soviet Union. Frantic stands as a lesson that threats from a common foe, even in the age of Mikhail Gorbachev, are not enough to wash away decades of hostility and centuries of divergent social development patterns. Although political considerations are always deeply intertwined with military affairs, American policymakers must exercise care when employing this nation's armed forces to fulfill largely political objectives.

Chapter 1

Introduction

On 2 June 1944, just days before the Allied landings in Normandy, 127 B-17 Flying Fortresses and 64 P-51 Mustangs of the Fifteenth Air Force landed at the bases of the newly activated United States

Eastern Command. The bombers, part of the 5th Bombardment Wing based at Foggia, Italy, struck the marshalling yards at Debrecen, Hungary. The historical significance of this particular mission was that it terminated at American airfields located inside the Soviet Union. This, the first mission of Operation Frantic, opened a hopeful new era of US-Soviet military cooperation. Although the stated objective of Frantic was to widen the air war against Adolf Hitler's realm, United States political and military leaders saw it as a first step toward postwar collaboration with the USSR.¹

Frantic's relatively late start, a stunning German attack on the main base in late June, and the rapid success of the Soviet summer offensive all served to eclipse the military importance of the Eastern Command, which was created specifically for this operation. Though Americans remained on Soviet soil well into 1945, their presence was largely the result of Washington's long-standing plans to parlay Frantic into an enduring Soviet-American partnership for the war against Japan and beyond. As a result, the men of Eastern Command were expected to serve as ambassadors to the Soviet Union. This paper examines Eastern Command's relations with the Soviets during Operation Frantic, a great experiment in US-Soviet cooperation. Given the recent thaw in the cold war and Moscow's support-albeit lukewarm-of United Nations' actions against Iraq in the winter of 1990-91, the possibility of direct US-Soviet military cooperation has reemerged. Political and cultural differences still remain, as they did during the titanic struggle against Nazi Germany. Before American policymakers plunge into any scheme aimed at joint operations with the Soviets, we should pause and examine the results of Frantic, the longest sustained contact between American and Russian soldiers in World War II."²

The Soviets did not share the Americans' enthusiasm for strategic bombing. The Soviet air force was designed and equipped to serve as a supporting arm for ground operations. Although they clearly appreciated the contribution strategic bombing could make to their own war effort, the Soviets nonetheless remained both skeptical and suspicious.³

Notes

¹ Richard C. Lukas, *Eagles East: The Army Air Forces and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1970), 197.

² *Ibid.*, 214.

³ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 308. The British, however, were even less impressed than the Soviets with the idea of shuttle bombing. Royal Air Force leaders considered the entire operation a stunt.

Chapter 2

Frantic Negotiations and Early Days

In October 1943, a team of American representatives headed by Maj Gen John R. Deane arrived in Moscow. Their task was to convince the Soviets of the value of American bases in the Soviet Union to carry out shuttle raids from bases in England and Italy. The Americans argued that such an operation would render all German-held Europe vulnerable to strategic air attack, cause the Luftwaffe to redistribute its fighter resources (a prime concern for the planned Allied landings in France), and increase the tonnage of bombs dropped on Germany by permitting raids on days when the weather precluded a return to either England or Italy but did allow landings in the USSR.¹

After months of often frustrating negotiations, the Americans received Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's permission to use three bases in the Ukraine for Operation Frantic. Despite the goals stated above, the Americans had hopes of achieving much more. The United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF) formulated five objectives for Operation Frantic and its parent outfit, Eastern Command. The two considered most important by the Americans were "the establishment of a precedence for the operation of American forces from Soviet soil, leading to improved American-Soviet relations" and gaining experience by both American and Soviet personnel looking to the possible establishment of bases in Siberia for operations against Japan." The remaining objectives, incidentally, referred to an expansion of the air assault on Germany, dissipation and dislocation of the German war machine, and finally, assisting Soviet operations.²

Thus, Frantic was conceived from the very beginning as more than just another military operation. Eastern Command was expected to demonstrate to the Soviets that in the absence of the desired second front in France, the Allies were waging war on Germany with every means at their disposal. At the same time, the Americans hoped to impress the Soviets with strategic air power while using Frantic as a "springboard from which broader military understanding and future developments can be launched." The operation was of more "immediate value psychologically than militarily." Allied propaganda themes were to stress the "comradeship-in-arms" of the two nations as well as the threat Frantic posed to Germany's air defenses.³

With the arrival of the first Americans in the Ukraine in the spring of 1944, Army Air Forces leaders were sensitive to the relationship between their men and the Soviets.⁴ Yet the level of preparatory activity and the novelty of the operation created a buoyant spirit of cooperation. For the Americans, Frantic was an opportunity to see the war from a new perspective.

Indeed, even skeptical observers viewed the operation positively at first. First Lieutenant Hanlon E. Davies, a former investigator for the red-baiting Dies Committee in Congress, described relations with the Soviets as friendly, but he felt morale was low due to the long hours involved in setting up the bases.⁵ Other reports also struck an optimistic note on Frantic's early days. The Soviets, according to eastern Command reports, "demonstrated their complete cooperation. Their attitude seemed to be that any shortcomings or failure of the operations must not be attributed to them."⁶

Eastern Command recognized the Soviets' willingness to do all they could to accommodate the Americans. The work of building the bases was "conducted in an atmosphere of the utmost friendship". The command reported that there was "every evidence that the Russian and the American {sic} could and did get on together remarkably well."⁷ Unaware of any frustration experienced by General Deane and his staff in their dealings with Moscow, Eastern Command looked forward to a fruitful period of joint operation with the Soviets.

The negative comments emanating from Eastern Command in this period seemed rather trivial. The highly centralized Soviet command structure, for example, irritated and perplexed the Americans. Typically impatient, many Eastern Command officers only slowly realized that their Soviet counterparts operated under strict instructions and had to refer to higher authorities nearly all requests that were contrary to those guidelines. While taking this as a sign of the great importance the Soviets attached to Frantic, the Americans had difficulty overcoming the feeling that the Soviets were being uncooperative.⁸

Nevertheless, relations between the two nations appeared warm and cordial with the arrival of the first Fifteenth Air Force team from Italy on 2 June 1944. Maj Gen Alexei Perminov, the Soviet area commander, presented Lt Gen Ira C. Eaker, the Mediterranean Allied Air Force commander, with a large bouquet of flowers. General Eaker, in turn, presented General Perminov with the Legion of Merit. Reports commented on the grand reception accorded the Americans and deemed the conduct of US military personnel "exemplary." The success of the first Frantic mission and the warm reception combined to mark, in Deane's opinion, the "high tide of our military relations with the Soviet Union."⁹

To many American observers, this auspicious start appeared to vindicate the policy of patient negotiations with the Soviets. For the next few weeks, relations between the two nations at Eastern Command bases remained generally friendly. Unfortunately, the events of 22 June and later could combine to cripple Frantic and undermine the spirit of cooperation evident thus far.

Notes

¹ Memorandum, Brig Gen George C. McDonald, to Deputy Commander of Operations, USSTAF", subject: Appreciation of Frantic, 21 August 1944, Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC), Maxwell AFB, Ala., File 522.609-1. The military scope of Frantic never lived up to American aspirations nor, for that matter German fears. The Fifteenth Air Force, for example, made initial plans for 800 bomber sorties a month with an estimated force of 360 B-17s and B-24s. Frantic's bomber operations barely approached half the planned figures. See Yon Hardesty. *Red Phoenix: 111e Rise of Soviet Air Power, 1941-1945* (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 198-99. For the initial German reaction to Frantic, see Adolf Galland. *The First and the Last: The Rise and Fall of the German Fighter Forces, 1938-1945*, trans. Mervyn Savill (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954), 284-85.

² Memorandum. Brig Gen George C. McDonald, to Headquarters USSTAF, subject: Report on Intelligence Discussions and Developments in Moscow Relating to Frantic Operations, n.d., McDonald Papers, MS-16, box 6, folder 7, USAF Academy Library Special Collections.

³ Memorandum, Supreme Headquarters, subject: Allied Expeditionary Force, Psychological Warfare Division, Psychological Warfare in Connection with Operation Frantic, 21 May 1944, McDonald Papers, box 6, folder 7.

⁴ The Americans received the use of three bases in the war-ravaged Kiev-Kharkov region of the Ukraine: Poltava served as both Eastern Command's headquarters and the main bomber base, Mirgorod also held bombers, and Piryatin, the farthest west, served the escorting fighters. The bases required everything before the Americans deemed them operationally ready. The Soviets provided laborers, guards, mechanics, and mess personnel. The Soviet air force also assumed the responsibility for air base air defense. See Hardesty, 199: and John F. Kreis, *Air Warfare and Air Base Air Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1988), 204.

⁵ Upon his return to England later in the summer of 1944, Lieutenant Davies provided a lengthy memo on his impressions of the Soviets. Ordered to "keep a lid" on his feelings, Davies failed to account for all copies of his "top secret" memo. As it turned out, he exploited growing tensions to work his own agenda and was accused of leaking" negative and derogatory information. Admittedly a poor choice for an assignment of this nature, Davies was subsequently court-martialed for his disobedience. Memorandum, 1st Lt Hanlon E. Davies to Director of Intelligence, USSTAF, 28 July 1944. McDonald Papers, series 2, box 3, folder 9. See also a series of memos pertaining to Davies case in the same collection.

⁶ Memorandum, Headquarters Eastern Command to Headquarters USSTAF, subject: Russian Attitude and Reaction, 16 June 1944, AFHRC, File 522.01-1.

⁷ Memorandum, General McDonald to Deputy Commander of Operations, USSTAF, Appreciation of Frantic, 9-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8. Eastern Command's intelligence officers described the Soviets as "proud and sensitive. This (gives) the impression of being uncooperative and cautious." See memorandum, McDonald to Headquarters USSTAF. Report on Intelligence Discussions.

Notes

⁹ Edmund Hicks, "Soviet Sojourn," *The Airpower Historian* 11, no. 1 (January 1964): 1; Maj Gen John R. Deane, *The Strange Alliance: The Story of Our Efforts at Wartime Cooperation with Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 114; Memorandum, Eastern Command, to Headquarters USSTAF, 1.

Chapter 3

Problems with Soviet Air Defenses

On 21 June 1944, 163 B-17 bombers and 70 P-51 Mustangs of the United States Eighth Air Force droned across northern Germany headed east. After striking targets in the Berlin area, the task force completed its mission at the bases of Eastern Command.¹ The American aircraft were escorted to their bases by a German reconnaissance aircraft. The Heinkel He 177 long-range bomber circled the field at Poltava, USSR, photographing the American units below.² The Soviet base commander, however, refused an American request to send up fighters to shoot the German aircraft down.³ The Heinkel returned, unmolested, to the German air base at Minsk, USSR. There, Luftwaffe Col Wilhelm Antrup, recognizing a rare opportunity to strike back at American bomber units, put together an assault force of nearly 150 He 111s and Ju-88s.⁴

On the night of 21 June 1944, the Luftwaffe attacked the Americans at Poltava, achieving devastating results. The sporadic and inaccurate fire of the Soviet antiaircraft batteries, together with the glow from the searchlights around the field, helped pinpoint the base for the German pathfinders. The Luftwaffe units encountered no Soviet night fighters. The Germans had planned for a 20-minute raid but hesitant to leave such a lucrative target, stayed over Poltava for more than an hour and a half.⁵ After the raid had subsided, the Americans found that every B-17 had sustained some damage; 50 were destroyed and another 29 were deemed usable with extensive repairs. By 24 June, the 45th Combat Wing at Poltava had only nine flyable B-17s. The German force left the scene unscathed.⁶

The Luftwaffe's success at Poltava cast a pall over Frantic and Poltava cast a pall over Frantic and hobbled Eastern command. Shocked and embittered American commanders inside the Soviet Union contemplated terminating the entire operation. Yet they had been completely unaware of the danger to their bases. On 16 June 1944, Eastern Command's own intelligence section estimated that the Germans could muster some 200 long-range bombers within reach of the American bases.⁷ The Soviets, however, had the responsibility of defending the bases against air attack but they, too, warned the Americans of a possible German attack. Anxious to open

Frantic and pressed for time due to delays in the negotiations in Moscow, the Americans were willing to accept both the risk and the Soviets' commitment to defend them.⁸

Upon their arrival, American officers had immediately questioned the adequacy of Soviet defenses. They did not believe that the equipment was sufficient. From Moscow, General Perminov controlled air bases defense; he and his staff were generally cordial. When questioned by US officials on the details of the Soviet air defense system for Eastern Command, they became extremely sensitive and upset. General Perminov declared angrily that his men "were well capable of handling the situation. " By dawn on 22 June, it was painfully evident to all at Poltava that the Soviets had been unequal to the task.⁹

Obviously, American morale suffered a noticeable drop following the German attack. Still, Eastern Command's men did not appear to place the blame for the fiasco solely on the Soviets. An Eastern Command report on morale following the attack stated that most American personnel "were in some ways favorably impressed with the Russians and were eager to promote [good] Russian-American relations whenever possible."¹⁰ The strain in relations was evident, however, in a report from Brig Gen George C. McDonald. "Keen resentment was felt and much comment was made [sic] at the alleged inability of the Soviet forces to protect U.S. personnel from bombardment by enemy aircraft." But the Americans also held their own commanders partially responsible. "Condemnation of U.S. higher headquarters." General McDonald's report continued "was voiced for alleged failure to determine if Soviet forces could adequately protect the personnel and airdromes prior to the beginning of operations."¹¹

Still, a growing sense of mistrust and tension following the German raid prompted McDonald to warn Gen Carl Spaatz that the Americans should avoid "rubbing in the present setback at Poltava in a manner that would question our resolution to continue the battle against the enemy."¹² Spaatz consequently ordered that American personnel refrain from making any public statements critical of the Soviets.¹³

Notes

¹ Operations Narrative, 390th Bomb Group Mission File 134.21 June 1944, SMS 575, box 2 USAF Academy Library Special Collections.

² Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds.. The Army Air Forces in World War II, vol. 3, Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 313.

³ Interviews with Col Joseph A. Moller. 98th Bomb Group, Colorado Springs, Colo. 11 October 1989. According to Colonel Moller the Soviets were concerned that "it would be said the Americans had to defend themselves at Russian bases."

⁴ Maj Heinrich Hofer. Defeat (Washington. D.C.: Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, 1946), 69. Hofer won the Knights' Cross for his part in the raid.

⁵ Ibid. Ninety-eight percent of the 110 tons of explosives dropped by the German force fell on or near the American aircraft.

⁶ Memorandum, Archie J. Old Jr., to Headquarters USSTAF, subject: Report on Shuttle Mission to Russia. 6 July 1944. Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC), Maxwell AFB, Ala. File 522.01-1. Old was the task force commander for the mission that arrived on 21 June 1944.

⁷ Memorandum, Headquarters Eastern Command, subject: GAF Threat to USAAF Airfields in Russia. 16 June 1944. McDonald Papers, series 2, box 3, folder 9.

⁸ John F. Kreis, Air Warfare and Air Base Air Defense (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History. 1988). 204.

⁹ Ibid.. 205.

¹⁰ Headquarters Eastern Command. "Report on the Status of Morale in the Eastern Command," 5 October 1944, AFHRC, File 522.0591-2, 15 August-10 October 1944. 1.

¹¹ Memorandum. Gen George C. McDonald. to Maj Gen Frederick L. Anderson. subject: Eastern Command. USSTAF. 7 August 1944. McDonald Papers. box 6, folder 7.

¹² Memorandum. General McDonald to Gen Carl A. Spaatz, subject: Procedures with the Russians Following Recent Attack on Poltava, 22 June 1944, McDonald Papers, box 6, folder 7.

¹³ Von Hardesty, Red Phoenix: The Rise of Soviet Air Power, 1941-1945 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 201.

Chapter 4

Morale Problems

Paradoxically, on the same day as the German raid on Poltava, the Soviets launched their great summer offensive. The Soviet assault shattered the German Army Group Center in a matter of days. By the end of July, Soviet troops were approaching the outskirts of Warsaw and preparing to drive into the Balkans. The speed of the Soviet advance placed Eastern Command's bases farther and farther from the front. As the Red Army continued to roll forward in August, most of the potential targets for Frantic fell into Soviet hands.

As the operational value of Eastern Command thus declined, American morale at the three bases plummeted. The Fifteenth Air Force mounted two fighter-bomber missions in late July and early August while the Eighth Air Force mounted two bomber missions. A politically charged supply drop to the beleaguered Polish resistance was carried out by heavy bombers of the Eighth in September. After that, Frantic was effectively over.¹

As the summer wore on, the men of Eastern Command began to feel "remorse and self-pity" at having given up more "important and comfortable jobs" to come to the Ukraine. The idleness brought on by a lack of operational activity combined with a "Loss of faith" in the significance of Frantic created a simmering discontent among the rank and file. As the Americans settled into a boring, peacetime camp routine deep in a strange land, their relations with the Soviets began to fray.²

Despite its reduced operational role, USSTAF still held Frantic to be important politically. Eastern Command was to bridge the cultural and political gulf that separated the two nations. With a diminished sense of urgency and cooperation, the inherent differences between them emerged with a vengeance. The reported number of incidents-such as thefts, fights, and harassment mushroomed during the summer months even before Eastern Command's operational stand-down. Often these incidents were quickly elevated to higher command levels, resulting in a barrage of charges and countercharges between the headquarters of Perminov and Brig Gen Alfred A. Kessler. To maintain amicable relations with the Soviets, the American command investigated each complaint, regardless of the amount of available evidence. Judging from the

records of Eastern Command, the Soviets did likewise. But this was not enough to halt the unfavorable turn of events.

Perhaps the greatest issue at stake for the average GI was not the bombing of Germany but his ability to fraternize with local civilians, particularly the women. Soviet women worked in the mess halls and cleaned the barracks of Eastern Command. They were described in official reports as "willing workers" who "liked their jobs and liked to work with the Americans."³ Though relations between US personnel and Soviet women quickly became a matter of concern for the commanders of both air forces. Eastern Command personnel were permitted to visit local towns and villages with relatively few restrictions.⁴ General McDonald considered incidents involving women as the number one priority in relations with the Soviets. The Soviet commander at Mirgorod quipped that the two air forces were fighting on the "petticoat front." Although this may sound somewhat lighthearted, McDonald reported that the growing number of incidents recorded in July was even then severely impairing relations.⁵ Eastern Command reported that Soviet women, while in the company of Americans, had been both verbally and physically assaulted at Poltava and Mirgorod. The Americans stated that the Soviets involved in provoking these scenes were both uniformed members of the Soviet armed forces and civilians.⁶

Despite official Soviet denials, Eastern Command officers believed that the only reason behind these assaults was a deliberate campaign mounted by the Soviets to halt social contact between American airmen and Soviet women.⁷

Eastern Command's medical officers generally reported on sanitary conditions and the like and avoided making politically charged statements. Even they sensed problems on the petticoat front. Regarding relations with local villagers, they reported no clashes of any kind with the Soviets and remarked that in all cases we have been cordially received and hospitably treated." Overall, the American medical staff felt that Eastern Command personnel were deliberately prevented from mixing freely with the locals "because of some subtle Soviet military action." Eastern Command's chief surgeon apparently recognized the political importance of Frantic but concluded in a July 1944 report that the two nations were "still not entirely trustful of one another."⁸

Notes

¹ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 315.

² Headquarters Eastern Command, "Report on the Status of Morale in the Eastern Command," 5 October 1944, Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC), Maxwell AFB, Ala., File 522.0591-2, 15 August-10 October 1944, 1-2. The men of Eastern Command also sensed that their mission had failed by late summer. The headquarters of both the Eighth and Fifteenth air forces, in the opinion of some Eastern Command officers, had lost all enthusiasm for *Frantic* by August. Indeed, the official history of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) stated, "relations with the Russians indeed became the major problem of this phase of MAAF's history. The closer the Russians advanced across the Balkans, the more difficult (it became) to maintain a satisfactory working partnership with them." Headquarters Army Air Forces, *History of Eastern Command*, pt. 1, chap. 28, "Combat Operations," 1945, AFHRC, rue 522.01-2, 12-13

³ Army Air Forces, *History of Eastern Command*, pt. 2, 1 October 1944-1 April 1945, AFHRC, File 522.01-3, pages 8-9.

⁴ Office of the Historian, USSTAF, interview with Brig Gen Alfred A. Kessler, commanding general, Eastern Command, 5 July 1944, in "Eastern Command Term Report," n.d., AFHRC, rue 522.01-1, vol. 2, pt. 1.

⁵ Memorandum, Brig Gen George C. McDonald to Maj Gen Frederick L. Anderson, subject: Eastern Command, USSTAF, 7 August 1944, McDonald Papers, box 6, folder 7.4-5.

⁶ Memorandum. Headquarters Eastern Command, subject: Reported Incidents Involving American Soldiers and Russian Personnel. 10 July 1944, in Army Air Forces, *History of Eastern Command*, appendix, AFHRC, rue 522.01-1, vol. 2, pt. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Army Air Forces, *History of Eastern Command*, vol. 2, pt. 2, "Report of Hospital Station 560," 5-6.

Chapter 5

Fraternization and Mistrust

As the summer continued, the nature of these incidents became increasingly serious, prompting Eastern Command's officers to begin limiting contacts between American troops and Soviet women. The earlier confrontations were limited largely to verbal or physical abuse of the female dates of American troops. By September, however, Eastern Command reported that on several occasions uniformed Soviet personnel drew weapons-pistols and knives-and no longer limited their intimidating behavior to the women.¹

Without access to Soviet records, it is impossible to determine at what level, if any, in the Soviet command structure decisions were made that led to these developments. Certainly, some of the hostility toward fraternization was simply the result of local jealousies. Many Soviet women had been accused of consorting with the Germans as well, and memories of the occupation may have made the local population somewhat bitter toward any foreign males. At the same time, it is quite likely that both the Americans and their Soviet girlfriends exaggerated the seriousness of these incidents. The amount of evidence in Eastern Command's files, however, would lead one to believe that at least on a local level, Soviet authorities were actively interfering with the ability of the two groups to socialize which, in turn, led to strained relations and growing mistrust.

Still, the Americans cannot be held blameless. Sensationalist stories in the American press regarding Soviet brothels, the presence within Eastern Command of Russian-born Americans with tsarist pasts, and the obvious material wealth of the men of Eastern Command helped to create an air of suspicion and resentment among the Soviets who may have manifested these feelings by harassing their women who preferred foreigners to "good Soviet males."²

Given the remarkable amount of freedom granted the Americans in the USSR, problems involving fraternization seem somewhat perplexing. For example, the Soviets did not attempt to censor American mail.³ Nor, did they fully enforce restrictions on the circulation of publications brought into the country by their allies. While Eastern Command "leaned over backwards" to adhere to these restrictions, Soviet officers and educated enlisted men were reported to be

voracious readers of magazines such as Time, Yank, and Life. Soviet authorities also permitted the Americans to travel rather freely in the region and to take photographs-two activities usually denied the average Soviet citizen.⁴

The behavior of some Americans was an embarrassment both to the Army Air Forces and Eastern Command. Although this would not justify a deliberate Soviet campaign of harassment, it did generate a great deal of resentment among the Soviets. Of prime concern to General Perminov were reports that the Americans were selling food, clothing, and other items on the black market. As early as 12 July, for example, roughly the same time the first fraternization incidents were reported, local peasants informed two American enlisted men that two Eastern Command captains had stopped along the road and offered various goods for sale. In response, a Soviet captain and an American lieutenant went to the small village of Belo Tserkovka to investigate. At that point, one Soviet woman produced a price list that an American had scribbled on a V-Mail blank. She told the two that she had purchased a bar of soap for 120 rubles. Two other women claimed to have acquired a US Army blanket for 700 rubles.⁵

American officials blamed the black market activity on a drop in the ruble/dollar exchange rate from 17:1 to 5: 1. The Soviets, civilian and military alike, took a dim view of such business and resented American wealth. Combat crews, in the country for a short time and looking to make a fast buck, sold candy, food, cigarettes, and clothing to Soviet civilians. Americans assigned to Eastern Command, however, often gave away these items. The former activity offended the locals who did not understand why one American gave them things while another insisted on selling them. The latter activity alarmed Soviet authorities that were sensitive to the contrast between American wealth and the poverty of the war-ravaged and politically volatile Ukraine.⁶

Since the Soviets appeared gravely concerned over this matter, the Americans attempted to investigate these and similar incidents. They were actually hampered, however, by the Soviets themselves who displayed a reluctance to allow their personnel to serve as witnesses or to provide testimony against alleged black marketeers. In the absence of such support, Eastern Command often found it virtually impossible to press charges. The command resorted to increasing the frequency of briefings designed to educate US personnel on what was considered acceptable behavior inside the Soviet Union.⁷

By August, it was becoming increasingly apparent to the Americans that relations with the Soviets, above a purely personal level, were rapidly deteriorating. On 21 August, McDonald reported that it was still too early to determine if a "methodical attempt from Russian political

sources" was under way to destroy relations or if the worsening situation stemmed simply from local jealousies. He pointed out that friction of the kind described above had "unfortunately happened in all countries where foreign troops are quartered." Yet both sides, sensitive to the political nature of Frantic, tended to view the growing number of incidents not as the result of a clash of cultures but of political meddling.⁸

Maj Gen Hugh J. Knerr, Eastern Command's chief of logistics, praised the Soviet air force as "extremely friendly and cooperative" but accused the "political control in Russia" of being hostile and stubborn. He believed that the Soviets viewed the war as virtually won and no longer desired an American presence in the Ukraine. Thus, he wrote, "the Devil is no longer sick and [sic] not interested in becoming a monk for the defeat of Germany." General Knerr recommended the complete termination of Frantic by 15 September 1944.⁹

Despite General Knerr's pessimism, USSTAF, particularly General Spaatz, wanted to continue and even expand Frantic. General Deane reported, however, that Moscow indicated in late August that an expansion of the operation would not be granted. On 27 August. Generals Spaatz, Eaker, Knerr, and Maj Gen Robert T. Walsh adopted US Ambassador Averell Harriman's solution of keeping Poltava through the winter, once again to serve as a springboard for larger operations in the future. The Soviets agreed to this plan on 30 August; nevertheless, Frantic began winding down amidst still worsening relations.¹⁰

Notes

¹ Soviet-American Relations, July-September 1944, Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC), Maxwell AFB, Ala., File 522.291.

² Despite official denials, several leading American newspapers ran lurid articles about the kind of entertainment available to American GIs in Soviet Russia. Moscow's official position stated that brothels and prostitution simply did not exist in the USSR.

³ Headquarters Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, vol. 2, pt. 1, 1945, AFHRC, File 522.01-2, 61-2.

⁴ Memorandum, Eastern Command to commanding officer, AAF Station 561 (Mirgorod), subject: Sale of American Goods to Soviet Civilians, 27 July 1944, in Soviet-American Relations, July-September 1944. AFHRC, File 522.291.

⁵ Memorandum, Brig Gen George C. McDonald to Maj Gen Frederick L. Anderson, subject: Eastern Command, USSTAF, 7 August 1944. McDonald Papers, box 6, Folder 7, 6; memorandum, Steven J. Zand, civilian air technician, to Maj Gen Hugh J. Knerr, subject: Unofficial Memo, 11 October 1944, in Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, appendix.

⁶ Memorandum, McDonald to Anderson, 6.

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⁷ Memorandum. Brig Gen George C. Mc Donald, to Deputy Commander of Operations, USSTAF, subject: Appreciation of Frantic. 21 August 1944. AFHRC, File 522.609-1, 10.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Memorandum, Maj Gen Hugh J. Knerr to commanding general (CG), USSTAF, subject: Frantic Logistic Situation, 25 August 1944, in Eastern Command, "Miscellaneous Correspondence, Memoranda, and Messages, June-September 1944," AFHRC, File 522.161.

¹⁰ History of Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), 10 December 1943 to 1 September 1944. AFHRC, File 622.01-1, 368-69.

Chapter 6

Worsening Relations

September was a critical month for Frantic and the men of Eastern Command. Stalin finally consented to the use of American bases in the Soviet Union for dropping supplies to the embattled Polish resistance forces in Warsaw. He had stalled too long for the airlift to be of any true value: the Poles were exhausted and nearly at the end of their gallant effort at self-liberation. Alas, the Grand Alliance was already foundering on the rocks of clashing interests in Poland and Eastern Europe. George F. Kennan wrote that the Warsaw Uprising (1 August-3 October 1944) was the moment when "if ever, there should have been a full-fledged and realistic political showdown with the Soviet leaders." By delaying aid to the Poles in Warsaw, the Soviets made obvious their plans for the character of postwar Poland.¹ From Moscow, General Deane noted the fraying ties between the two powers. As the controversy over the fate of Poland grew, Deane wrote that the Soviets began to "harass the Americans in Russia in a very petty way."²

In fact, some charges were well founded: drunken American officers and men were found to have instigated fights with Soviet personnel at local restaurants. On the other hand, the American command considered the majority of Soviet charges baseless. The Soviets, for example, accused several Russian-born, Russian-speaking American noncommissioned officers of making "prejudicial remarks about the Soviet form of government to a group of Soviet citizens." Once again, the Americans dismissed the charges due to a lack of evidence, but the men in question were evacuated to "maintain amicable relations."³

As with the incidents involving women, Eastern Command perceived an organized effort on the part of some Soviets to discredit American troops. Admittedly, several of the allegations were legitimate. Yet virtually every incident that the Americans found to be without foundation involved Russian-born and/or Russian-speaking Americans. Eastern Command concluded that the Soviet air force was not behind this harassment: except for General Perminov, their personnel knew nothing about the incidents. Thus, the Americans believed, the charges originated elsewhere.⁴

To counter the adverse effects of these incidents on US-Soviet relations, General Walsh issued another order on 15 September containing a list of items upon which Eastern Command personnel departing the Soviet Union were forbidden to comment. Apart from the usual security-related topics, the list specifically mentioned "comments derogatory to the Soviets." Ever mindful of Eastern Command's political role, Walsh informed his troops that "as one of the few American soldiers who has served in Russia" they were to be "fair and accurate" in their statements. Critical generalizations about the Soviets, particularly to the American press, could "nullify months of sincere and successful effort by the entire command" to cultivate mutual understanding. Walsh ordered his people to "stick to facts."⁵

The aforementioned supply drop to Warsaw, carried out on 18 September, was the last mission flown during Operation Frantic. In October, Eastern Command stood down for the winter. The persistent Americans were able to keep some 200 personnel at Poltava, which was placed in a caretaker status. Mirgorod and Piryatin were returned to sole Soviet control.⁶

Personal relations between individual Soviet and American personnel remained good. Indeed, few disciplinary cases were reported during the winter months. Eastern Command still reported a few instances of indiscreet behavior on the part of some Americans: the offenders in most of these cases were evacuated to placate the Soviets. In general, the Americans described relations during the fall of 1944 as friendly "even to the point of political sympathy. . . in spite of periods of uncooperativeness. "⁷

Despite generally warm personal relations, problems persisted that served to keep the two sides at odds. Thefts, especially on the part of Soviet guards continued, as did American involvement in the black market. When Soviet soldiers persisted in shooting the stray dogs adopted by the Americans as pets, Poltava's commander, Col Thomas K. Hampton, warned of violent reprisals by his airmen. But these were petty concerns compared to what was about to happen.⁸

The events that led to the near breakdown of relations did not take place at Poltava itself but warrant mention here. Though Frantic operations had long since ended by March 1945, the American Military Mission in Moscow that month instructed Poltava's personnel to help with the evacuation of disabled American aircraft and liberated prisoners of war (POW). The Americans encountered friction and confrontation in both tasks.

As the Soviets drove deeper into Germany in the early months of 1945, they became increasingly wary about the presence of representatives of the Western powers in Eastern Europe. Justifiably proud of their victories over the German Wehrmacht, the Red Army, or so

Eastern Command reported, did not want outsiders in territories they considered theirs by right of conquest (or liberation). Whatever Soviet motives, they restricted the movements of Eastern Command personnel dispatched to the front to aid in evacuating American assets. Soviet liaison officers, derisively dubbed "bird dogs" by Eastern Command, oversaw the movement of liberated POWs. The Americans wanted to process these men through Poltava to Tehran, Iran. The Soviets demanded instead that the Americans move through Odessa, a port on the Black Sea. Eastern Command accused the "bird dogs" of physically blocking the evacuation of United States POWs. Yet both at the front and at Poltava, Soviet officials insisted that American evacuees, including the sick and wounded, pass through Odessa. Irregularly fed and provided with little water, the liberated POWs suffered on the long trip to Odessa in cramped and filthy railcars. Soviet treatment of these men enraged the Americans.⁹

Unmoved by American objections, the Soviets maintained this policy through the summer of 1945. Even the usually cordial and cooperative American medical teams began to report dissatisfaction with the Soviets.¹⁰ At the same time, however, General Deane ordered Colonel Hampton to stop prisoners of war proceeding through Odessa "unless General Kovalev threatens to use force."¹¹ In the end, the Soviets prevailed.

The Soviets were also reported by Eastern Command to be gripped by "paranoiac fear" over any United States Army Air Forces contact with Polish nationals.¹² Thus, an incident in March 1945 involving a battle-damaged B-17 that had landed in Poland evoked anger and outrage from Moscow. An American pilot attempted to smuggle a Polish national into the United Kingdom. The Soviets discovered the Pole dressed in an American flight suit and using the alias of "Jack Smith." Though USSTAF leveled charges against the aircraft commander, the damage to Soviet-American relations was irreparable.¹³

On 22 March, a B-24 Liberator took off without clearance from a Soviet-control led airfield in Poland. By 28 March, the Soviets grounded all American aircraft in the western Soviet Union—an embargo that lasted 22 days.¹⁴ What few shreds of the earlier hope and camaraderie that remained were not entirely gone. These actions no longer represented a matter of fraternization or pet dogs but constituted a direct threat to the Soviets' control over their own territory (or that which they occupied) and their air space.

Notes

¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1967), 210-11.

² Maj Gen John R Deane, *The Strange Alliance: The Story of Our Efforts at Wartime Cooperation with Russia* (New York: Viking Press. 1947), 123.

³ Memorandum, Maj Gen Hugh J. Knerr, commanding, general (CG), USSTAF, subject: Frantic Logistic Situation, 25 August 1944, in Eastern Command, "Miscellaneous Correspondence, Memoranda, and Messages, June-September 1944." Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC). Maxwell AFB. Ala.. File 522.161.

⁴ Memorandum, Headquarters Eastern Command, subject: "Reported Incidents Involving American Soldiers and Russian Personnel." 10 July 1944, in Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, appendix, AFHRC. File 522.01-1. vol. 2, pt. 2.

⁵ Memorandum. Headquarters Eastern Command, to Personnel Leaving Eastern Command, 15 September 1944, in Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, appendix.

⁶ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1951). 318. The Americans were still not ready to abandon Frantic completely. Generals Arnold and Spaatz persisted until April 1945 in pushing the idea of staging American bombers out of Soviet-held territory, this time in Hungary. Growing weary of the Soviets' stalling tactics, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff officially ended any further hopes for Frantic. See History of Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), Headquarters Army Air Forces History of Eastern Command. 367-80

⁷ Craven and Cate, 145-49.

⁸ Memorandum. Col Thomas K. Hampton to General Kovalev, in Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, pt. 1, page 6.

⁹ PWX Contact Team, US Military Mission to Moscow, message to General Deane, 10 April 1945, AFHRC, File 670.614-2.

¹⁰ Army Air Forces, History of Eastern Command, vol. 2. pt. 2, pages 11-12.

¹¹ Richard C. Lukas, *Eagles East: The Army Air Forces and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1970). 212,

¹² *Ibid.* 213.

¹³ General Deane, message to General Spaatz, 31 March 1945. AFHRC, File 670.01-3E, annex 65, tab F.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The Soviets allowed a small number of supply and emergency flights to and from Tehran. See also Lukas. 214.

Chapter 7

Value of Operation Frantic

In terms of its stated political objectives (the military ones being another matter entirely), Frantic was a marginal success at best. On an individual level, Soviet and American troops got on quite well. Seemingly minor events, however, were often interpreted in a political vein by the men of both sides. Still, tense US-Soviet relations during Frantic were simply a reflection of the problems and misunderstandings that developed at all levels between Moscow and the Western Allies. Thus, as relations deteriorated within the Grand Alliance, particularly as the Red Army surged westward, Frantic suffered the consequences.

What makes this outcome so disappointing is the fact that the Americans viewed Frantic as primarily a vehicle for greater US-Soviet cooperation. Hopes were certainly high at USSTAF for the operation's military potential as well. Frantic's absence, however, would not have measurably affected the course of the air war against the Reich.¹

It is also extremely unlikely that Frantic, by itself, could have eliminated or significantly reduced Soviet-American enmity. While overstating its military value, the Americans also overestimated Frantic's potential impact on the Soviets. By early 1944, Stalin no longer had any doubts about achieving victory over Nazi Germany. With the Red Army's great successes in July and August 1944, the Soviets may have believed that they no longer needed the kind of close cooperation with the Americans Frantic was designed to foster.

The bitterness felt by many Americans following the German strike of 22 June was due, in part, to latent and long-standing feelings of mistrust toward the Soviets. By the same token, the political realities of Stalin's Russia and the vicious nature of warfare on the Eastern Front were not conducive to the kind of tolerance and openness necessary on the part of the Soviets to build a long-lasting friendship with the world's greatest capitalist state.

Eastern Command also had to contend with cultural variables not present to such a degree at bases elsewhere in Europe. To imagine that Soviet society was much like that of America was naïve at best and a misperception that has shown a stubborn tendency among Americans to

endure. Thus, cultural differences, together with lingering suspicions based on politics, prevented any genuine understanding from developing during Frantic.

One must be cautious when drawing comparisons between cooperation with Stalin's Russia and Mikhail Gorbachev's troubled empire. Cultural differences and political suspicions between the US and the USSR stubbornly persist despite recent changes in the Soviet Union. These factors helped lead Frantic down the path to failure; indeed, any similar operation conceived more as a political move than a military one would probably suffer the same fate. Instead of bridging gaps between the two erstwhile Allies, Frantic simply broadened the gulf. Thus, future combined operations must be developed and sustained with clear military goals taking precedence over political considerations.

We can now draw interesting parallels between Operations Desert Storm and Frantic. Allied air operations against Iraq were carried out among air forces that had cooperated closely for decades. At the same time, the distinct cultural differences between the Western members of the allied coalition and their Saudi hosts were overcome to some degree by the urgency of the situation and the Iraqi threat, both real and perceived, to Arab interests. By 1944, however, the Soviets believed, with some justification, that Nazi Germany had been beaten largely through their efforts, and the presence of American units on their soil was both bothersome and unnecessary.

Nor was Desert Storm mounted primarily to enhance Arab-American relations or impress them with our weapons and doctrine. Frantic, as we have seen, reflected the American belief that the Soviets could be made to see the value of strategic bombing despite their marked lack of interest in such operations. American planners failed to realize that, more often than not, results speak for themselves. The Soviets evaluated strategic bombing in World War II based on their goals, doctrine, and, most importantly, their accomplishments. From the Soviet perspective it was evident that the Red Army's great victories over the Wehrmacht in 1943-44 had been achieved without strategic bombing.

Similarly, the Kremlin must certainly view the gutting of its client in Baghdad with dismay. Soviet military leaders watched from a distance as the American led coalition shattered the Iraqi war machine that Moscow had molded in its image. Yet allied air forces did not fly a single sortie from Soviet soil (or that of Syria or Iran for that matter). Thus, in neither case could or did a joint operation alter the Soviets' view of American strength or their perception of military victory.

Although Frantic's failure should not consign all efforts at cooperation with Moscow to the trash heap, it should serve as an example of how not to construct future operations. While Carl von Clausewitz, the great Prussian military theorist, may have said that military goals must serve political objectives, military necessity must outweigh other factors in deciding upon operations of this nature. If the threat of Nazi Germany was not enough to cause the Americans and Soviets to work together more harmoniously, how can one expect the ambitions of petty third-world tyrants to accomplish this?

On 23 June 1945, exactly one year and one day after the Luftwaffe's crippling strike on Poltava, Eastern Command faded into history. American aircraft would never again fly combat missions from Soviet soil. Despite its shortcomings, Frantic saw some 1,300 Americans serve at Eastern Command bases while nearly 5,000 USAAF crew members and temporary personnel served in the Soviet Union for varying lengths of time.² If Frantic failed to achieve its political and "geostrategic" goals of creating closer US Soviet ties, it did represent an experiment in true military cooperation between the two great powers. That this experiment did not bear fruit may be due more to our tendency to view all situations through the prism of American thought and experience than to anything else.

Notes

¹ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day. January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 318-19. Even the Germans viewed Frantic primarily as a propaganda ploy.

² Richard C. Lukas, *Eagles East: The Army Air Forces and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1970), 214.